

“Broken Trust, Broken Lives”  
2 Samuel 12:1-9; Romans 2:17-24;  
Ephesians 4:25-32; Matthew 5:27-37

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*Neither shall you commit adultery. Neither shall you steal. ~ Deuteronomy 5:18-19*

We didn't have enough going on in this service with the mission team commissioning and communion, so I decided we would do two commandments instead of just one. Really, I'm going to be gone next week and when I planned this series I didn't realize I was not going to be here. So we are going to do two commandments today.

The interesting thing is that they in some ways are similar commandments about not taking something of someone else's, not entering into a breaking of a relationship in that way. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal.

It's interesting that the word “steal” in Hebrew as it developed not only means “to steal” but has come to mean “to deceive.” It's not just a matter of taking something, but the way we work deception into our lives. I think that's part of the whole thing.

In some ways it feels like we should be able to just say—and especially since we've got so much in the service—that these are pretty straightforward. Don't steal and don't commit adultery, then we're done. Perhaps we could do that if Jesus hadn't done a little bit more with this. He says, “You have heard it said, ‘Don't commit adultery,’ but I tell you even if someone lusts for someone else they commit adultery in their hearts.” If that's not enough, these incredibly hard verses come right after that. These vivid images about tearing out your eye and cutting off your hand. If nothing else, they get my attention, but they're not as easy to understand.

I tend not to be a literalist, and I'm really glad, particularly when I come to these verses. I don't think Jesus is asking us to truly be literal here. One thing we might realize is that these statements were made in a different time and culture. Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrback wrote a book about looking at the context things are in, the sociology and anthropology of the time. One thing they said is that the nature and understanding of personhood in Jesus' time had three aspects to it. There was emotion-fused thought. There was purposeful action. And there was the ability to communicate, to hear and say. Parts of the body were associated with the parts of that personhood.

These verses don't talk about an ear or a mouth, so the communication piece isn't here, but we have the two other pieces. The eye is about emotion-fused thought. It's what we take in. It begins to be about what is internal, what we think about, and the decisions we might make. Then we have the external, the hand, which is associated with the action we take and the behaviors we might exhibit. So if we begin to think about that, what Jesus is saying is when we have that emotion-fused thought, it can begin to create something in our lives that is not good and we should try to remove it from our lives. We can begin to create behaviors that aren't helpful, that can be hurtful,

that can break relationships, and we should try to remove those kinds of behaviors from our lives.

So as we begin to think about the nature of these two commandments—don't commit adultery and don't steal—we see how Jesus extends that to really encompass us all. We all have some kind of thought that we recognize takes us down one of these paths. We begin to want something that somebody else has, and we might break a trust in doing so. We have broken people's trust in some way.

In thinking about that, King David is the poster boy for these two commandments. He was this incredibly great king. All through scripture it points back to the great King David. And yet, what do we remember most about what he did? He slew Goliath, and he committed adultery. He saw, he desired, he had emotion-fused thought, and he took action on it. Because of that, there were real consequences. There were consequences for Uriah, who ended up getting killed because of what David did. An innocent man dies. Bathsheba's first child, the result of that union, died because of it as well. Nathan comes and describes what David did as stealing—stealing the ewe from the poor man. He's the example that when we think about stealing, we shouldn't think about a poor person trying to grab a piece of bread. He's the example of a rich person taking from the poor, using privilege and power to steal, to take. He's an example of all that can go wrong.

The interesting thing about this is that while he's the example of all that can go wrong, he still ends up being king, and being the one looked back to. In fact, the next child he has with Bathsheba is Solomon, and Solomon is in the lineage of Jesus. How does that happen? Is it because God just overlooked it? No. It's because David was confronted with what he had done wrong, and he realized it and repented. David is an interesting example for us, not only of being encouraged not to go there in the first place, but to realize that when mistakes are made life is not necessarily over (although it was for Uriah). But life can go on.

This is a human story. I guess God wouldn't have given us these commandments if there weren't something about us and our humanness that tended to do these kinds of things. All I have to do is look in the news today to see that it is still happening. Did anyone read about the richest man in the world—Jeff Bezos, head of Amazon—and the scandals he's going through right now? Here we have this man who said, "As you go through life, only open doors that you'll have no regret opening, because some doors you go through and you can't go back." And yet, that knowledge doesn't seem to have served him well enough to not have been one who followed in the shoes of David on the wrong side of the commandment.

We don't know what will happen with him. What we do know is that as these early Christians heard Jesus teaching, they recognized it as something that was to guide them. *To put away falsehood and speak the truth, for we are members of one another.* Not the deceit of stealing or adultery, but to be truthful and honest with one another.

I think part of the problem we sometimes have with these passages from Jesus is that instead of recognizing them as a gift of grace, an invitation into a good life, into a

life that hasn't been broken, we use them to further break our relationships up by using them to condemn people who have made mistakes. I think what Jesus is doing is instead of wanting us to condemn, he is inviting us to try to not go into the brokenness. God can do either one. He can guide us on the good path or he can heal us from brokenness, but it's a lot better just to go on the good path. If we're broken, that hurts. We've all been there, I'm sure. I don't think we can be human without having experienced some brokenness. God is willing to heal us.

But Jesus is not condemning. He's saying, "Here's where you want to go. You want to put away the falsehood." That's what his followers recognized. Put away the falsehood and speak the truth to one another, for we are members one of another. Our relationships matter. When we put away the falsehood and when we recognize that the calling is one of grace into goodness, it may require healing of our brokenness, but it's a calling into being those who have recognized the grace of God and share the grace of God with one another and begin to shape a community together and make something that wasn't there before.

It's very interesting to me at the end of the Ephesians passage the way it describes how we go forward. In the world we are all about making sure we get our own. But as it tells us to put falsehood away, as we remember that we are part of one another, it goes on to talk about making sure what we say is building one another up. It says we don't want to be grieving the Holy Spirit. What it says is "to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgiving as we have been forgiven." That's the way the early church understood what it was all about. When they heard Jesus extending the commandment, they didn't see it as something that was there to condemn people, but to help us see there is a better way. We all struggle and the way out of brokenness is not condemnation, but tenderheartedness. Forgiving one another as we have been forgiven. Being kind to one another.

In a world that doesn't seem to value kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness nearly enough, we as followers of Christ are invited to try to be truthful with one another. To simply care and build one another up in tenderheartedness, kindness, and forgiveness. As we do that, we are invited to come and be Christ's people. To become the people that sit at his table and know that the source and sustenance of our life is the very God who sent Jesus to show us the way, to express forgiveness, to enable us to know mercy, to invite us to be tenderhearted and kind.

As we experience this invitation and are invited to come around the table, it's an interesting time to remember these commandments and how, in a way, they are an invitation to introspection. How am I in my emotion-fused thought serving God, showing the goodness of God, or on the contrary, somehow making God disreputable? How am I in my internal life and thought doing this? Or in my actions, how am I showing the love and grace of God, or not? Those are good questions to go into Lent with. They are questions these commandments invite us to think about, even as we are invited to be the people of God gathered around the table, knowing our true sustenance, our true guidance, our life, comes from God. Amen.